

April 16, 2019

Scott Dibble, State Senator  
Minnesota Senate  
85 University Ave W  
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55155

Frank Hornstein, State Representative  
Minnesota House of Representatives  
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd  
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55155

Lisa Goodman, Council Member  
City of Minneapolis  
350 South 5th Street, Room 307  
Minneapolis, MN 55415

Jono Cowgill, Park Commissioner  
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board  
217 West River Road North  
Minneapolis, MN 55411

Meg Forney, Park Commissioner  
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board  
2117 West River Road N  
Minneapolis, MN 55411

LaTrisha Vetaw, Park Commissioner  
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board  
2117 West River Road N  
Minneapolis, MN 55411

Dear Senator Dibble, Representative Hornstein, City Council Member Goodman, Commissioners Cowgill, Forney and Vetaw:

Thank you for your letter dated April 12, 2019 regarding tree removal in the Kenilworth Corridor for the METRO Green Line Extension (Southwest LRT) project as part of upcoming construction activities. We appreciate your thoughts and concerns and recognize this will be one of the first visible changes as we begin Southwest LRT construction.

As you are aware, last fall, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) issued the Council a Letter of No Prejudice (LONP), which allows the project to move forward with clearing and related activities in preparation for heavy construction. The work to prepare the area for construction of the Kenilworth tunnel and associated structures is a critical schedule element, and any delay would have significant ramifications to the project's viability.

Delaying the removal of the trees and associated work would require a change order with the civil contractor to stop work altogether in Kenilworth corridor, as it would alter the construction timeline. First, any change orders must be negotiated with and agreed to by the contractor and would involve public dollars being used to pay delay costs and penalties.

Second, halting work on an area that we received an LONP to move forward with could jeopardize the project's status with the FTA.

Third, waiting for the FFGA would push revenue service out, impacting the project's budget as well.

As I'm sure you can appreciate, many of these impacts are cyclical in nature – negatively impacting the project's status with FTA likely delays our receipt of FFGA, which increases the delay cost, which further threatens our financial capacity, and so on.

Based on these real risks, we cannot wait for the FFGA to begin the planned work. Advancing construction work under LONPs is standard procedure for projects like SWLRT. The Central Corridor / Green Line project used nine LONPs for construction in advance of that project's FFGA. There are other projects around the country that have been almost entirely constructed before they were awarded a FFGA. However, there has never been a New Starts project that has received an LONP from the FTA that hasn't ultimately received a FFGA. We have every confidence the SWLRT will receive its FFGA as well. The cost of waiting to move forward would not only have a financial impact, but it could threaten the project's viability entirely.

We do take seriously the impact this construction will have to the Kenilworth corridor and the entire corridor. The Council heard the community's concerns and engaged stakeholders in multiple ways to address their tree and landscaping concerns with the Kenilworth Corridor. The Council will live up to its commitments as outlined in the project's Record of Decision and developed through the Kenilworth Landscape Design process.

In 2014, the Southwest LRT Project Office, in coordination with the City of Minneapolis, Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board, Minnehaha Creek Watershed District and Hennepin County, conducted a tree survey to develop a baseline inventory of trees and other vegetation along the corridor.

In 2015, the Council formed the Kenilworth Landscape Design Committee whose charge was to develop designs supporting the Kenilworth Corridor area as a natural setting and to visually minimize LRT-related infrastructure in the Kenilworth Corridor area. During the design process, the Council held community meetings, open houses and pop up events in the corridor; all designed to engage the community in developing landscape plans. Final designs plans were presented to the community in November 2015. Meeting materials and renderings are posted online at <https://metro council.org/Transportation/Projects/Light-Rail-Projects/Southwest-LRT/Public-Involvement-old/Design.aspx?source=child>; for your reference.

Following this work, the Council refined the corridor's "Limits of Disturbance" in 2016 and minimized the number of trees to be removed. Of the approximately 2,100 trees in the Limits of Disturbance; approximately 800 trees are to be retained and 1,300 trees are to be removed, of which, approximately 300 trees are considered significant by City of Minneapolis code (12" diameter at breast height [DBH] and greater). In addition, the Kenilworth Corridor landscaping plan includes planting approximately:

- 1,100 new trees with calipers ranging 1" to 5";
- 2,700 shrubs;
- 4,000+ perennials;
- 50,000 native plugs; and
- 18 acres of native seeding (see attached landscape plan).

It is our sincerest hope that the community-developed Kenilworth Corridor design will support our mutual goals of increasing the livability in our region for our shared communities.

Please feel free to contact me at 651-602-1453 or [Nora.Slawik@metc.state.mn.us](mailto:Nora.Slawik@metc.state.mn.us) should you have questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nora Slawik". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Nora Slawik  
Chair

CC  
Lynnea Atlas-Ingebretson, Metropolitan Council Member  
Robert Lilligren, Metropolitan Council Member  
Marion Greene, Hennepin County Commissioner